



Jim  
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# Olympia Report



State Senator • 15th District

March 28, 2003

This marks the end of the 11th week of the legislative session. One week remains for the House and Senate policy committees to approve bills from the other chamber.

Key regulatory reform "jobs bills" given public hearings in the House are:

**SB 5256** – a measure that requires the cost-benefit analysis of new rules be completed early in the process and brought into the debate on a proposed new rule.

**SB 5257** – a measure that requires the governor to approve all new rules adopted by agencies that have directors appointed by the governor.

**SB 5766** – a measure that requires 200 days notice to affected businesses of significant new rules that impose penalties or sanctions.

**SB 5052** – a measure delaying implementation of significant new agency rules until the Legislature has met in session and can determine if the new rules fit within policy adopted by the Legislature.

- Business leaders joined House and Senate Republicans at a news conference on March 26 to urge House Democrat leadership to hold hearings on the "pro jobs bills" still waiting action. The savings in these bills represents millions that could be spent on business expansion and job creation.

**Senate's cost-savings supplemental budget for the remainder of the 2003 fiscal year awaits House approval of conference committee report.** When important bills fall into dispute between the House and Senate, a conference committee of representatives and senators is created to work out the differences. Senate Republicans put the governor's proposed cost savings for the next biennium on a fast track to start the savings now. **SB 5403**, as it passed the Senate in January, would have saved the state \$127 million through June 30, 2003, and increased the savings in the next biennium by about \$250 million.

**Senate approves key pro-jobs component of U.S. Small Business Administration's model legislation package.** Under **SB 5053**, state agencies cannot adopt regulations that are more stringent than federal standards without specific legislative authority. This measure provides uniformity, consistency and certainty for our state's businesses and industries. The Senate has passed a total of eight bills to reduce the stranglehold of red tape on Washington's businesses and help employers create more jobs.

**Bill to lessen impact of minimum wage requirements and help Washington citizens find and keep jobs wins Senate approval.** **SB 5697** ties the state minimum wage to unemployment rates. Every time unemployment rises 1 percent, it equals 42,000 lost jobs in Washington. Because unemployment rates fluctuate month to month, **SB 5697** requires the minimum wage calculations to account for these changes. This bill will put people back to work by preventing huge jumps in the minimum wage when unemployment is high.

**Water rights bill addresses Supreme Court ruling.** In 2002, the Washington State Supreme Court ruled the Department of Ecology (DOE) could impose bypass flow conditions in a water quality certification regardless of whether the applicant had existing water rights. **SB 5028**, approved by the Senate, clarifies that DOE cannot restrict a valid water right in the name of "pollution prevention." Supporters say the state needs to separate water quantity and water quality issues and that a water right should be independent of water quality concerns. Protection of water rights is a significant issue for Washington's agricultural community.

## Committee assignments:

Agriculture and Rural Economic Development

Environmental Quality and Water Resources

Ways and Means

Republican Assistant Whip

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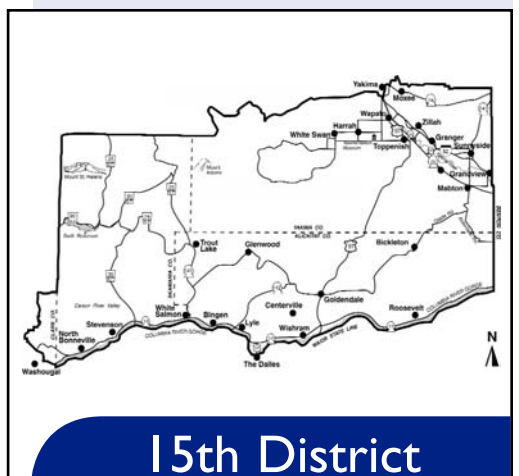
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## Legislative information on the Internet:

[www.leg.wa.gov](http://www.leg.wa.gov)



15th District



**Senate passes fix for "unaffordable" Basic Health Plan.** The state's Basic Health Plan (BHP) was created to help low-income workers without employer-sponsored health insurance. However, the state is facing a \$175 million deficit in the program by July 1 of this year. To save money, the governor has proposed dropping 60,000 adults without children from the plan. **SB 5807** gives the state Health Care Authority the ability to fluctuate the number of people covered based on budget conditions. The federal poverty level is used as the measurement tool to prioritize who is covered. Eligibility controls are tightened so that only those who really need the coverage will receive it. SB 5807 solves the problem by changing criteria rather than a wholesale elimination of coverage as proposed by the governor.

**Senate approves two key bills to address the problems of access to affordable health care.** **SB 5521** eliminates costly state-imposed mandates on small group health care plans. The changes made in this measure will allow more employers to offer health care insurance to their employees. Under this measure, employers and employees choose what coverage options they want and can afford. **SB 5209** targets out-of-control medical malpractice litigation by capping awards for noneconomic damages at \$350,000. Malpractice premium costs have skyrocketed causing doctors to stop delivering babies, and clinics to close their doors. Rural communities have been particularly hard hit by the loss of health care providers.

**Prescription drug discount program created in SB 5904 to ease the burden of the high cost of prescription drugs for low-income elderly and disabled residents.** Under this measure, the state Health Care Authority is directed to negotiate lower prices for drugs for any Washington resident enrolled in the discount program and who lacks third-party prescription

drug coverage. The bill also creates a statewide senior prescription drug information and training program to educate seniors on the safe and appropriate use of prescription drugs. This program is modeled after a successful program initiated in Yakima County in 1998.

**Senate raises eligibility levels for senior citizens and disabled retirees to qualify for property tax exemptions and deferrals.** The rising costs of health care and inflation continue to erode the buying power of low-income seniors and disabled retirees on fixed incomes. **SB 5034** increases allowable income levels on average of \$5,000 so more seniors and disabled retirees can qualify for valuation freezes, property tax deferrals and exemptions from excess and regular levies.

Up-to-date information about the work of the Senate on a daily basis is available at the Senate Republican Web site: <http://www.src.wa.gov> – please come visit. Toll-free Legislative Hotline: 1-800-562-6000 and TTY is 1-800-635-9993

To the people of Stevenson, please accept my apologies for not including your town on the 15th District map featured on the front page of this update. Stevenson is an important part of our district. In order to save money, we will use up the current supply of the paper for the session updates and then add Stevenson to the map when we reorder paper for these updates.

As a way to help cut mailing costs, I'm offering to send my session updates to you via e-mail. If you would like to receive future updates by e-mail, please call my Olympia office at (360) 786-7684 or e-mail my session aide Patrick Connor at [connor\\_pa@leg.wa.gov](mailto:connor_pa@leg.wa.gov).

**Please use this space for any comments, suggestions or problems you would like me to know about.  
Or call the toll-free legislative hotline at 1-800-562-6000.**

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